

Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council Meeting Minutes, November 1, 2012

Meeting Minutes –November 1, 2012

Attending: Rodney Barker, Bob Burke, Barbara Darnell, Groot Gregory, Srdjan Nedeljkovic, Peter Meyer, Greg Reibman

Ex Officio Aldermen: John Rice and Richard Blazer

Guests: Didi Bleyer, Justine Cohen, Jeff Cohen, Rick Dyer, Paul Feinberg, Eunice Feller, Steve Feller, Mildred Hutchinson, Beth Lewinger, Ron Mauri, John Sanders, Annabelle Ship, Harry Sanders, Robert Soloman, Chris Steele

Ex-Officio past-President: Janice Bourque

Srdj called the meeting to order at 7:40 after determining that a quorum was present. Bob presented the October minutes and they were approved with two corrections requested by Groot. The revised October minutes will be submitted along with this month's minutes at the December meeting.

Groot then presented the Treasurer's Report. There was no change from September's report. As of October, 31st, there was \$7,964.53 in our checking account and \$15.00 remaining from cash donations. We still owe \$300.00 to Parks and Recreation for the Haunted House and we will shortly need to allocate money for the Ice Rink.

1. Issues Related to Signs on the Walnut Street MBTA Bridge. 2nd Installment

A frank and extended discussion took place between Council members and various members of the community to resolve disputes over the placement of signs on the Bridge.

Srdj presented what he hoped could be a fair overall framework for the placement of all signs to give visibility to events and gatherings taking place in the Highlands and as space for local artists and merchants to inform the community of various public events, classes and other gatherings.

1. We should encourage signs that promote community activities of non-profit groups in the Highlands, the arts and crafts of local artists, and events by local businesses that encourage public participation.
2. We should discourage posting of sales promotions by for profit entities as well as poorly crafted displays and activities that don't relate specifically to the Highlands.

3. There should be time limits for displaying signs depending on the source and nature of the event promoted.
4. The Area Council would serve as the adjudicating body for posting signs on the Bridge when disputes arise.
5. One person from the Council should serve as the go to person for ensuring the orderly posting and removal of signs and as a de facto arbiter of any conflicts and disagreements that might arise.

Bob proposed that Srdj's proposal be adopted by the Board as the official guidelines for the posting of all signs on the bridge. Council members had high praise for the scope of the proposal and there was no disagreement on tone or substance. But several members argued that a vote on the proposal should be postponed to the December meeting because no member had come forward to serve as liaison between the Council and village interests hoping to post signs at the bridge. The vote to postpone was approved on a voice vote.

2. Newton Highlands Parking Pilot-Update

Ron Mauri of the Parking Subgroup announced that the October windshield survey of parked vehicles in the Village had been postponed because of Hurricane Sandy. This gave additional time to fine tune the questions. They expect the survey to take place next week and the results should be available in time for our December meeting.

3. Highlands Parking Meter Pilot Program

The City has started a 90 day pilot program on Lincoln Street to test the use of electronic "smart" parking meters that have been placed on both sides of Lincoln Street between Walnut Street and Columbus Street. A device within the system will alert meter maids when a meter's time has expired. Drivers can use coins or credit cards and the system will eventually accept debit cards, Charley Cards and tokens

4. Dog Related Issues at Cold Springs 6th Installment

Discussion resumed on health and safety concerns associated with off leash dogs at Cold Springs. Srdj announced that Parks and Recreation Commissioner Bob DeRubeis could not make tonight's meeting, but planned to attend the December meeting to discuss dog related issues at Cold Springs. This was included in the

City's response to the letter Srdj had sent in October about the Council's vote in favor of a fenced in area for all off-leash dogs.

There was general discussion about the difficulty of rule enforcement with so many dogs running off leash along with comments that aggressive dogs and dog feces on the trails have caused many to stop using Cold Springs for recreation.

Beth Lewinger , from the Off Leash Area Working Group, appeared before the Council to argue that Cold Springs should be closed altogether as an off leash dog park. She noted that the Working Group had established a process and criteria for selecting locations for off-leash dog parks.

These included things such as being in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), aesthetic impacts, conservation impacts, impacts on homeowners and other abutters, costs, current off-leash status, distribution of parks, enforcement, impact on other usage, parking, site characteristics and size.

Beth concluded that Cold Springs has failed to meet almost all of these criteria. She claimed that there has been little scant regard for abutters, for safety, or the potential costs for lawsuits.

5. Requesting Council Support for Customer/Staff Parking Behind Staccato Boutique Storefront

Paul Feinberg, the landlord for the vacant Staccato Boutique storefront on Lincoln Street, appeared before the Council to ask its support for a variance to allow employees and customers of an incoming beauty salon to continue to use the existing 17 parking spaces in back of the building. There would be 16 spaces for the beauty salon and one for the recently installed Bank of America ATM, immediately adjacent to the vacant storefront.

The City's parking regulations have been tightened in recent years in a way that does not provide for 17 spaces on land currently available for parking behind the building.

To approve a variance, the City must agree to "grandfather" the existing parking space arrangement for the new renters. The Land Use Committee and ultimately the Board of Aldermen will make the final decision on a variance in the coming weeks and months.

After a brief discussion, the Council cast a unanimous 7-0 vote to support the waiver.

6. Bread and Chocolate Raises Concern about Impact of Hyde Farmers Market

Steve and Eunice Feller from Bread and Chocolate appeared before the Council to voice their concern about the adverse impact they believe the Winter Farmers Market at the Hyde Center will have on their business, particularly during the December and January holiday period.

They are particularly upset that as many as three roving bakeries from outside Newton will be selling their goods in direct competition with their business, and that this is grossly unfair since these vendors are free and mobile operations that are not burdened with city and state regulations or taxes.

A discussion took place on ways to possibly ameliorate the impacts. Comments ranged from whether a one day a week farmers market would really be that disruptive to admonitions that every care should be taken to make certain village businesses that do pay local property taxes, are not financially weakened by the actions of City Government.

Srdj promised Steve and Eunice that the Council would keep on top of this and do everything it could to influence a fair outcome.

7. Expanding the Council's Service Area into Winchester Street Neighborhoods

The petition drive to support the expansion of the Council's Service Area into the Winchester Street area will begin this coming weekend. It was noted that 20% of the affected residents (registered voters) must sign a petition supporting the expansion for the measure to proceed to the Board of Aldermen which would then schedule a date for the voting on the proposal.

Several members of the Council offered to assist the neighborhood residents in collecting these signatures. Srdj stated he would coordinate this and let members know about the date and time (probably Sunday afternoons) that the canvass is scheduled to take place. We are shooting for around 175 valid signatures.

8. Winter Lights Scheduled for Officer English Garden

John reported that Paul will hang the winter lights once an outlet has been found for the electricity. He expects some resolution shortly.

8. Village Business Issues.

- Ron Mauri announced that a meeting with village businesses is being planned to discuss all parking and parking related issues.

- There is still no word on what will replace Bank of America, but the landlord is requesting the Council's support for a variance from the City to allow a larger number of potential renters.
- The Channel Café is still in negotiations with Michael Baker to take over the remainder of Bakers Best five year lease, but they want a guaranteed fixed price for five years in any rental agreement and there is only two years left on Michael's lease. This issue is still being negotiated with Michael and the landlord.

9. Hyde Bandstand.

John announced that a meeting has been scheduled with Inspectional Services Commissioner John Lojek on all the permits needed to begin construction of the bandstand. It is hoped that construction will begin in May and that the bandstand will be open for performances sometime in June.

10. Hyde Ice Rink

Paul is scheduled to build the ice rink on or about the 21st of December.

11. Next Month's Guests

Srdj announced that Bill Paille, Director of Transportation and James Freas, Chief Planner for Long Range Planning would be present at our December meeting to discuss transportation and parking issues.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bob Burke, Secretary,
Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council